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## Golden Fleece stories: December 9, 2003

### STORY #1. ALICIA: COUNTING THE CHILDREN

*(26.2.00) I was born in Nicaragua and I grew up within a community that was very strong: lots of children and lots of couples that all worked together. And we spent a lot of our weekends at the beach, with sand in my diapers, playing with other kids in the community.*

*When I was about two-and-a-half, my parents stayed up late one night talking about our future, and they made the decision that they wanted to stay in Nicaragua. Then the next day, four hours after they had gone to bed, an*

*earthquake hit, and destroyed Managua and six months later we left, with the city in turmoil.*

*But the people of that time in my life continued to be very important to me and I was in contact with them often. Two of the people who came out of that community were Kathy and Mark.*

*Last year in the summer I got a phone call letting me know that Mark had just died of cancer and the funeral was being held. So I decided to go. The funeral was in Costa Rica. I bought a ticket. And I went to the airport to get on the plane and they turned me back because my passport had less than six months validity on it. There was a new requirement to get into the country that your passport had to be valid for at least six months. So I was turned back and I wasn't able to go to the funeral.*

*And then last week, I got a phone call from Kathy and she said, "We're having a family reunion in Managua and there's a private chartered plane that we're using and it leaves in three days and there's a seat in it for you if you want to go."*

*So I hadn't renewed my passport in all that time, and I learned that you can actually renew your passport in about twelve hours. And I was on that plane going to Nicaragua and there I went to the beach which was only about eight miles from the beach that I played in as a child. There were sixty people there: half of them I knew from my childhood and half of them were related to the other people that I had known. I had an incredible time.*

*And then about three days ago, I got a call from Kathy and we were talking about the reunion. And then she said, "And oh, I have some sad news that the cabin that we had in Costa Rica: it just burned down yesterday."*

*I said, "Oh Kathy, I'm so sorry."*

*She said, "You know, it doesn't really matter. When I heard it, my friend told me, 'Kathy, sit down, I have some bad news,' and I sat down. When she told me it was just a cabin, I thought, 'Thank God, I'm so relieved. I thought for a moment that maybe it was one of the children.'"*

## **STORY #2. FREDERICK: JOURNEY TO THE NEXT MOUNTAIN**

*(28.0.47) I came to Washington in 1977. I came to work for a consultant firm for a federal contractor and I was running the Washington office. Soon after I arrived, they lost all their contracts. The day that I moved into my new house in Maryland, after moving in, I went to the office just to see what happened and I was fired, that afternoon.*

*Well, I didn't do very well in getting a job. This was in October and I was still unemployed by April. I had gotten my foreclosure notices and the phone didn't do very much for me. So I would go down to HEW and use the long distance phone to try to get a job. I was walking out by the building late morning and I walked by this guy on crutches and I glanced over at him as you do when you walk by someone like that he glanced at me and we both stopped and looked at each other.*

*It turned out that we had been drinking in a bar together in North Carolina ten years earlier. So he invited me to his office and I go up there, because I had nothing to do, and I'm sitting and we're talking and we're just shooting the breeze, and he gets a phone call.*

*He says, "Yes... yes... yes...I've got the guy right here."*

*So he hands me the phone and it was the office of the secretary of HEW. There was this major project and they needed a deputy, a number two person. So the next day, I was the number two person on the major project. This meant there was no foreclosure on my house. (laughter)*

### **STORY #3. SETH: FAITH**

*(29.1.00) It was 1979 and I was twenty years old and I was in graduate school in mathematics at Indiana University and a friend of mine, Timothy Knowing, had gone to Poland to research his roots. He was an artist friend and we had done lots of music and strange weird art together and he came back. While he was over there, he had spent some time with Jerzy Gritowksi (sp?), who in experimental theater circles is kind of a demigod. I had never heard of Jerzy Gritowski, and he shared stories about what it was like to be with him. He did not have fun working with Jerzy Gritowski. But I was really inspired by these stories. And so I decided that this was something I wanted to do.*

*I eventually dropped out of graduate school to do experimental theater full-time. The first event that we had, that we created, was an event that we did no rehearsing for. We did a lot of preparation. We put our posters all over town. It went by several names. One was "Lighting the switch." (sp?) Another was "Waggle Makes Connections" which later became the name of my theater company. There were several others that I don't remember. The only thing they had in common was that each poster had the same the place and time.*

*I recruited about twenty performance artists. Musicians, dancers, people with a lot of enthusiasm. We cobbled together a sequence of events, but it was just a bunch of ideas. Remember: we didn't rehearse at all. We'd say: "Well, you're going to be over here when we do this, and you're going to be over there when we do that." There was one scene, where a guy had finger paints that we had bought*

*at the drug store and he was rubbing them all over his body. His entire body was just covered in these bold blues and yellows and greens and reds, all mixed up. Then he married this woman. Then I came out as the devil and recited this whole poem. And then we baptized him in the Jordan River, which was this little creek in the Indiana University campus. Everybody knew it had toxic chemicals in it. He went in. He came out.*

*The way we got our audience was that we had hijacked a performance. There were these guys who played guitars who were really well known in Bloomington, and they did the show and we waited until their show was over. Then we immediately started performing for their audience. There were about a hundred people in the audience and by the time our show was done, which was about forty-five minutes long, there were still around eighty people in the audience. So we held on to a good number of them. And our show ended with a train: we had our hands on the hips on the person in front of us, and we were snaking through Dunmeadow (sp?), about eighty of us. And we were chanting: "I used to know somebody who used to be somebody, who used to know somebody you used to be. I used to be somebody who used to know somebody who used to be somebody you used to know." (laughter) I used to remember it was a great time. All of this publicity, all of this pulling people together, no rehearsing and it was a fantastic event. It was also a lot of fun. It was the beginning of a whole career change for me.*

#### **STORY #4. CAROLINE: LITTLE QUIANA VS BIG BUREAUCRACY**

*(31.0.0) My story is about a little black girl from the south-east DC whom I met in 1998. I was working with the police department in DC at the time. I was on patrol one Saturday afternoon with another police officer. When we saw a little girl flag us down, we were in a police car. And this little girl, Quiana, was no more than eight years of age. And apparently she was with her elder sister who was heavily pregnant and who was sixteen. And we asked what was going on. The older girl didn't want to talk to us. So I took down a few particulars from the little girl. Quiana shared that her sister had just been beaten up by her boyfriend.*

*And to cut a long story short, we arrested the boy-friend with the help of Quiana. But I felt I needed to take Quiana home to her parents. We got to Quiana's home and there were a lot of people in the house and we were not very welcome. The father actually admonished Quiana for interfering and getting the police involved. I remember telling the father that what Quiana had done was really very courageous and that she should be commended for it.*

*A couple of days later I put a report in to the police, basically to see whether Quiana could be invited to come and spend a day at headquarters and get see*

*what goes on and be treated like a queen for a day. It was to thank her for what she'd done. That report never went anywhere. I actually got quite upset with my boss as to why it never got anywhere. It should have been an enormous red flag to me about I wasn't in the right place for myself. It took me two years to leave it.*

*I often draw on Quiana when I'm working with organizations and teams. For so often we lose sight of what our purpose is and we fail to stand up for we believe and say what we need to say, particularly in a bureaucracy. Little Quiana stands out for me as someone who did that. (31.2.15)*

### **STORY #5. CINDY: ARTFULNESS**

*(32.0.30) About two years ago, I felt a significant block in my life, a very substantial block, and I became very taken with the notion that I had to find a teacher. I had to find a teacher who would teach me very specifically how to use paint to express my creativity. So I started calling art teachers and every time I said that's what I wanted to learn, I would get, "Well, that's not really what I do." They taught people how to paint and I didn't really want to learn how to paint. So I became really frustrated in trying to find a teacher.*

*So one day I decided: O.k., I need paint. For some reason, I need to have paint. I hadn't done this since I was about ten, when I was taking an arts class. So I went to an art store, and I looked at the little bottles of paint, with all their colors. And I noticed that above the shelf there were a number of art books, and the book that was sticking forward, which immediately attracted my eye was called, "Zen and the Art of Creativity." It was by an art teacher and it was filled with beautiful flowing colors and images. So I bought the book because I needed to have the pictures. Something told me I needed to have the pictures.*

*A couple of days later I was looking through the book and I noticed there was a web site. I went to the website and noticed that the artist had workshops. Out of curiosity, I clicked on the workshops and discovered that she had a workshop in Vermont. And as it happened, I was going to be in Vermont for the first time in ten years. So I phoned and the gallery and the artist answered the phone and I asked whether she had space in her workshop, and she said, "Well, I didn't until about an hour ago, when the last person who was going to be in the workshop called to say they had to cancel."*

*I told her what I wanted out of the workshop and she said, "That's exactly of course what I do."*

*And so I went to workshop and it was a life-changing experience because the way she taught creativity geared me up to be that more creative person that I was looking for. And it also taught me that a lot of creativity is about being open to,*

*just, possibilities, that present themselves to you, and the synchronicities that can come in when you're open like that. (33.0.40)*

## **Smithsonian Associates: April 2003: Future Stories**

### **STORY #1: THE GRANT**

*Participant storyteller: (II.40.0.59) It's 2004, and it's the next Smithsonian storytelling event and our group wants to report on the success of what has been going on. Our group developed a small network of storytellers, and we made a contract between us, that every single one of us would use the stories, with 50 people or organizations, in a six-week period. We would see how we would use stories to make a difference. So we got back together, and then we reported more on this. We collected more and more of these stories. We also had followed through with the organizations, and the result is: many of us have written books, (laughter) and articles. We've developed a web-site. And what's most exciting that we're going to report on, our group is making some of the presentations at this workshop, right here, now. And we have just been given a five million dollar grant from one of the U.S. agencies interested in knowledge management and storytelling. And we're asking all of you to participate in helping us develop this knowledge management and storytelling initiative. We are looking for your participation.*

### **STORY #2: REFORMING GOVERNMENT THROUGH STORY**

*Participant storyteller: Our team is happy to have a copy of an article from the Washington Post that reports on the impact our team has had in the last year.*

*We came together as a community of support as we took storytelling into the areas we work in. We impacted pharmaceuticals, health care, mortgage financing, the Food & Drug Administration (which became the template for change in the federal government), the legal industry and the Department of Veterans Affairs.*

*After we'd revolutionized the legal industry and the Department of Veteran Affairs, some of the things that we accomplished included more transparency, collaboration, knowledge sharing in pharmaceuticals, so that people weren't as protective. Mortgage applications became a joyful experience for home-owners. (laughter) The FDA continued with its process of internal reform with the medical library and its website to help produce empowered consumers who could make great choices on medicine and medications. And the FDA became much more*

*nimble than they are today. Skills not taught in law schools were introduced into law firms, with improved consumer experiences in working with the legal industry. And we bridged the gap in the DVA in terms of common expectations and really turning from creating adversarial stories in creating common ones. (applause, cheers)*

### **STORY #3: STORYTELLING AT THE UNITED NATIONS**

*Participant storyteller: (III.1.1.07) I'd like to welcome you all to our week long event, here at the United Nations. (laughter) I am pleased to say that Noa Baum will be performing. We also have Paul Costello doing a series of workshops with the peace folks. The heads of government are going to be meeting over in the Second Plaza building, to listen to stories, to hear and create stories for their people. The World Health Organization is participating with us, to educate populations about health, and to use stories as part of that educational process. Now, we're not all alone here at the U.N. We do have people around the world participating, through our virtual community and the collaborative technologies. We also have a series of workshops in which we will be exploring the use of our cultural artifacts, and various aspects of our own indigenous cultures, to share the storytelling process. Throughout this week, translations will be available, on the fly, so that we can fully participate with people from around the world. So please be very clear in your speaking, so that the translators will be able to translate as fully as possible. Now, our goal for this week is to ensure that people understand throughout the world that they have a voice, and that their voice matters. We want to thank all of the people who have made this wonderful week possible. It's going to be an exciting experience. We particularly want to say thank you to the organizers, most of whom had met through a program back in 2003 at the Smithsonian Associates. That conference on storytelling has risen to a kind of Jonesborough Festival scale. (laughter) We are delighted to see that the process of storytelling is growing around the world. Welcome and enjoy your week! (applause, cheers)*

### **STORY #4: BECOMING A BELIEVER**

*Participant storyteller: (III.2.0.06) The story that we created is a lot less ambitious, but no less important. The title of it is, "One person at a time." You see, it's April 2004. It's a wonderful spring day, the kind of day in which no one wants to be in a hole. (laughter)*

*Jack is coming down the corridor with his wife, who is saying to him, "You know, I don't know why I let you drag me down to this storytelling thing. I told you last*

*year when you went that it was probably going to be boring and foolish and stupid. And it has nothing to do with the kind of results that I want to find and bring to an organization. This is ridiculous and I am just doing this for you and you're going to really 'owe me one'.*"

*So they come towards the door, and his wife can hear these whoops of laughter, punctuated also by moments of silence, and some murmurings. And she's looking around thinking this is really going to be weird. And they come in. They're a little bit late. They're standing near the back, but they're near a table. And the people are already engaged in conversation and she's hearing their stories. And suddenly their stories are about fathers. And suddenly Jack's wife turns to him and says, "That's a story? I didn't know that was a story?" And Jack says, "You can whisper. You're disturbing the people."*

*And after a few more minutes, she says, "You know what? I've really been thinking about my father." There are tears coming down her eyes. "We'll talk later." Soon, there's a break in that exercise, and another one begins.*

*And it's hosted by someone named Madelyn Blair. And Jack's wife says, "Who is that?"*

*And Jack says, "Just listen!"*

*So Madelyn Blair starts to talk about this impossible task of reorganizing an organization one day, and Jack's wife's eyes almost roll through the back of her head. But she listens and Jack says, "Please, just listen."*

*And by the time the conversation is over, the presentation is finished, she was nodding her head and as they left, Jack's wife is chattering a great deal, but it's a different kind of chattering. She says, "You know what? I haven't told my grandchildren about my father. And I really need to do that. And by the way, I also think I want to call Madelyn Blair." (laughter, applause)*

## **STORY #5: THE RED SHOES**

*Participant storyteller: (Karen Dietz) (III.4.0.11) Well, all right. I would like to welcome all six hundred of you here today in the year 2004. Last year, everybody here agreed that we would take at least one story, to tell that had some value embedded in it. And we would tell that throughout the year. And I tell you that the listservs have been very active, how this has happened and the results we've experienced, so congratulations to everybody for doing that. Now today, we're*

*also going to talk about the tools, of using stories in organizations, and what we've accomplished, even if it's just in some of those small social changes that we've been looking for. So we're going to hear about the group results that we've achieved. And also the individual results. Now we've done this. All with lots of humor. And pizzazz. And color. And playfulness. And lightness. In other words, throughout the whole year, we've been wearing our red shoes, instead of our brown Oxfords. (laughter) In fact, there has been such a boom in the economy, because of the manufacture of red shoes. And we've all been telling our stories with our red shoes on. These stories are all about the power of people connecting, and some of these stories have actually been used, and have become ambassadors for global peace. So we're looking at the fundamental change, also in the attitudes that has happened through the power of storytelling and the ability to see possibilities through the stories, and looking at the positive side and the benefits, of how stories have changed us and our organizations, and our social culture. And we've become open to new ideas, in our work with stories, and how we've been sharing those with others. (applause)*

#### **STORY #6: ACKNOWLEDGING**

*Participant storyteller: (Carol Russell) (III.3.2.30) Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to welcome you back here to the Smithsonian Institute in the year 2004. You'll be hearing from some people later on today who have taken part in our "Each person acknowledged blossoms program". (laughter) We decided from last year, a group of us who attended the workshop in 2003, that we would go and find at least one person to acknowledge. We did this. You will hear from six people who represent the six thousand people that we've managed to reach in that year. I do hope that you have a wonderful day, and that all of the stories that you hear teach you something about acknowledging one person. Thank you. (applause)*

#### **STORY #7: CONNECTIONS**

*Participant storyteller: (Larry Forster) (III.4.0.50) It was getting harder and harder to follow all the visions that we heard. Nevertheless, being down here, the first vision that came to mind sounded like thundering hoofbeats, from the sound of all the people trying to get in here next year. So manageability came to mind. So we provided a structure to capture all the creativity and not let it get lost. So that was a big thing – the planning. We didn't get it done in twenty minutes. The planning would have to start now among all the established leaders, and adding on the additional ones, to take this and shape it, the rest of the way. Structure-wise, we thought there were three key elements:*

- *Making the core values visible through our stories, giving us all something to take home and we said, “Yes!! That’s why this is worth doing!”*
- *Then tools. Everybody wonders about it. They’re not sure whether this will work or not. It did work. We need examples to take back. This did work and why. This didn’t work, but it could work if we did this.*
- *Lastly, connections. I don’t know whether we need a bigger room. Or video-conferencing. Some screens? But we need connections. I walked the hall during lunch. This is a great place for a core group. The values of our country are all around on the outside, the stories that brought those to light. We need a structured way to ensure that we will connect with the geographically diverse communities that we spawn. (applause)*

## **Smithsonian Associates April 2003: Springboard Stories**

### **STORY #1: PROMOTING DIVERSITY**

*Participant storyteller:* (III.37.0.40) [Our story is one to encourage, to demonstrate the value of encourage the value of diversity in an organization.]

*In 2001, a government agency was doing final interviews to select a contractor to do diversity training. The question was posed: why should we select you? A junior member of the team, a young black woman raised her hand and said, “I’d like to answer. Several years ago, I was working for this company in a very low level position. The President came up to me and asked me, ‘What else do you do?’ Today, I’m sitting at this table. The company was selected. Imagine the richness of the world if everyone asked that question. (applause)*

### **STORY #2: SELLING THE POWER OF STORYTELLING AT NASA**

*Participant storyteller:* (Todd Post) (III.38.0.41) Ours is a situation where we’re trying to get the agency that I do storytelling work for, we’re trying to get senior managers interested, believing that storytelling can have an impact on the organization.

*In May 2001, a senior NASA manager, skeptical of the power of storytelling, told a story that was published in the NASA storytelling magazine. Another manager was able to use the story to save NASA half a million dollars on a project. (applause)*

### **STORY #3: HARMONIZING INTERNATIONAL CONTRACTS**

*Participant storyteller:* (Mary-Alice Arthur) (III.39.1.52) So imagine, if you will, that you’re a legal conference of a major drug company. You all work in different parts of the organization, or rather the organization is in all different bits around the world. And usually when you get together in conferences like this, you spend all your time arguing.

Sound familiar? *(laughter)* So our team is trying to put the case that we should be doing some collaborative work around setting up contracts so that people can, kind of, be harmonious about it.

*Last September, Drugs-R-Us Inc., which is an organization that is a competitor of ours, but also one that is based around the world. The U.S. has a lot of branches and their subsidiaries around the rest of the world as well. And each of the parts of this organization act as if they were a totally autonomous individual. Often when the U.S. would try to do things about contracts, and send it off to other countries, they would react in an irate fashion, for being forced into language that wasn't applicable to them, or wording or ways of working that they didn't find applicable, so that there was a lot of tension in this organization.*

*Finally Mike, who worked in the California branch, eventually got annoyed with all of this and as the manager of the legal branch there, he rang up Ian directly in the London office. The two of them worked together with their teams on a contract to manage their contracts and they were able to harmonize and work together very quickly. This stunned the rest of the organization, and so in the light of the results of that one team, they decided to set up a contract harmonization team with direct representatives from around the world. And they are now able to do all of their international contracts within a month. What would happen if we were able to do all of our contracts within*

#### **STORY #4: GETTING TO SAY “YES”**

**Participant storyteller:** (III.42.0.04) Imagine this. You're a group of storytellers. *(laughter)* There's a stretch, no? You're a group of professional storytellers and you doubt that you can bring your profession into the business place. You're some of the skeptics. This is the story.

*In October of 1999, a professional storyteller got a phone call. Someone had seen his website. They represented an association of business psychologists. They wanted to know: maybe the storytelling thing applies to us. And he said, “But I don't know anything about business! I don't know anything about psychology!”*

*And the person said to him, “But I want you to come anyway.”*

*And so he made a leap of faith, and said, “Yes!” And so he went, thinking all the time, “I don't know anything about business or psychology.”*

*But he told his stories. And he used mythology. And he asked them to imagine how it applied to them. And he simply told his stories. At the end of the day, there was so much excitement. And even better than that, there were so many phone calls from all the people who were there. And his business expanded.*

*So imagine if you would let go of the questions, like “I don’t know anything about x.” And you just got yourself ready to say, “Yes!” the next time somebody calls you. (applause)*

## **Living Story Process: April 11, 2003 :**

### **STORY #1: I DO NOT REGRET THE INCONVENIENCE: DAVE**

*(II.4.2.10) Dave: I began with some reflections on beginnings and endings. Our charge was talk a little bit about beginnings and endings. And my own reflection on that was that our entire lives, our days, our moments, are characterized by beginnings and endings. Some we notice, and some we don’t. Some are more dramatic. Some are more auspicious. But in any case, our lives are surrounded by them. So that’s to say that beginnings and endings are where you find them, and ultimately, what you make of them.*

*So I had such an experience this morning, coming in on the metro. I, along with a number of other people here, heard the announcement that an individual had been struck by a train at Metro Center and that further, “We regret the inconvenience, and thank you for your patience.”*

*And that brought me up short. What occurred to me was a question: what if those were the first words spoken in public about this individual, should the individual happen to have died. I thought: what an epitaph! “We apologize for the inconvenience. We thank you for your patience.”*

*It was at that moment that I felt a sort of daily beginning with a fresh resolve that should this day mark the end of my life, the first public things said about me would be, “We do not regret the inconvenience.” (laughter, applause)*

### **STORY #2. HIDE AND COME SEEK: JODY**

*(II. 6.1.10) Jody Brady: My story is about my son, Matt. And Matt is a mountain of a man these days. He’s about six feet five and he’s got flaming red hair. He started out with the flaming red hair, not quite as big. (laughter) I always like to say that I had Matt young and he was born old. He was a kid who wasn’t very good at playing. He didn’t get toys or things like that, like other kids when he was at a party. Even when he was age two, he would hang out with all the adults. He would get into all the conversations.*

*He used to be our ringer in Trivial Pursuits, because this little kid with this high-pitched voice would go, “Can I play?”*

*And everybody would say, “He can’t play.”*

*And we would say, “We’ll take him on our team.” And he would kill everybody. (laughter)*

*When he was really little, the only game he liked to play all the time was hide and go seek. He was very bad at it. His idea of hide and go seek was this. There was no variation except whether we were inside or outside. Matt would go a short distance from me. He was always the one who would get to hide. He would close his eyes and then I had to find him. I had to pretend that it was very difficult. I had to bump into things and look around and behind things before I could finally find him. He would be very happy when he was found and he would open his eyes, and we would start all over again.*

*And it was a very cute thing and some years later it occurred to me that he didn’t stop playing that game, but it became a metaphor, even though it wasn’t as cute. Matt would keep closing his eyes when bad things were happening. They weren’t happening for him because he couldn’t see them. And usually he would give his position away because he really wasn’t hiding very well from the rest of us. So we would go and find him and talk to him and, kind of, bring him back.*

*He continued to do this even through college. At one point, when he was pretending that he didn’t have any classes, and he had in fact stopped going to them, they sent him home for a year. And even that wasn’t quite enough to get out of this habit.*

*Last Fall, I was talking to him about something completely unrelated, and something just triggered it into me. And I said, “He’s hiding again.” And I wouldn’t let go. I kept looking for him and I called him and I went down to Charlottesville just to have dinner, so that he knows that I saw him and he got through this crisis, and hopefully he’s going to get through college this May. The thing about this story is: I worry. I worry that he is still this way. He has this enormous capacity for denial. But the thing that gives me hope is that whenever he hides, he always wants to be found. And I have been the one who has been lucky enough to get to find him. (applause)*

### **STORY #3. ONLY YOU CAN SAVE YOUR OWN WOUNDED ASS:**

*(II.7.2.45) Ashraf Ramzy: On my journey to that place where I am now, I had to travel through strange and hostile territory. And one specific place was a place where I got hurt the most. I was processing some of the wounds and the hurts, especially some stuff with my mom. And in this day, I remembered something that happened to me at a very young age. Only later did I find out that I was three years old in this story. At this age, my parents had emigrated from Egypt to Holland. We went back to Egypt for a vacation. I was three years old. They were*

*twenty-five at that time. I remember the house where they brought me. It was the house of my great great great grandfather. The house where my father had grown up. And I remember the house as if I had visited it yesterday. There was a big hall leading to a kitchen on the right. And there was an entrance hall to the right with windows. And on the left there was a room with a piano on this side of the wall with a picture of a lady hanging above it, which was my father's mother. And behind it was another room. And my mother sat me down on a wooden bench in the entrance hall. And she sat me down on a nail. And it hurt like hell. And later, when I confronted my mother with what she did to me, she looked at me and said, "Why didn't you just get up?" (laughter)*

*(II.8.1.38) Gail Rae: "Ouch!" I looked down at my half-naked body. My thirty-two year old daughter and I were in the locker room with another woman around my age, gray hair. I looked at that other woman and I said, "We deserve a medal for being in this class at our age."*

*She said, "Yes, I think we do."*

*My daughter looked at me and said, "You think you going to dance? You're never going to dance again at your age."*

*For those of you who are parents, you know your children are young, and they spit a little and sweat it off, and when they're a bit older, they throw up on you. (laughter) Then it gets better and they stop puking. But it just grows underground (laughter)*

*I didn't know why I was embarrassed. I just got dressed and went into the dance class and took the class and I had to work on myself to remember to tell my daughter when it was that she said hurtful things to me, because it always sort of passed. I concentrated and I concentrated and finally we finished the class. As I walked out, I said, "Do you realize that you said something that was really hurtful? It was embarrassing in front of someone I didn't even know."*

*"Yeah, mom," she said. "When you left the room, that woman looked at me and said, 'Can I ask you what is your relationship with that woman you just left?'"*

*And my daughter said, "Oh, that was my mom."*

*And the woman said, "Oh, right. That makes sense." (laughter)*

#### **STORY #4. DIVING DEEP INTO CURIOSITY: KELLY**

*(II.9.2.10) Kelly Cresap: This story begins in Portland, Oregon, with a carrot-topped boy aged five, holding in his hands a hamster. And the boy is totally engaged in this hamster, wrapped in curiosity about what's happening to that hamster, how it feels in his hands.*

*Curiosity is what took me from college to Seattle to begin a visual arts career.*

*And after that career was complete, curiosity drove me to start a life in Tokyo. I didn't know anyone. I didn't know the language.*

*And after a year of teaching, curiosity drove me to see some of the rest of Asia. I traveled for six months, from one country to another, one place to another.*

*Curiosity drove me to the ends of the world. And after a while, I recognized that the ends of the world were also inside my own being. And there was a great hunger to know what were the ends of the world in my own being, which led me to graduate school in Charlottesville, Virginia.*

*And in graduate school, I began a ten-year relationship with a curiosity about Andy Warhol. Why did I hate him so much? (laughter) Why did he seem so curious to me? What stories were there to tell about his stories? The stories that he told about himself were not complete stories. So I delved into the sixties, and all the wonderful and terrible stories that got unleashed in the sixties. And I connected with Warhol as an artist, as a fellow gender dissident (laughter), and that's the story that sustained me for ten years.*

*Curiosity has also led me to leave a full-time academic career, and to begin a life as a storyteller in Washington D.C. (applause)*

### **Story #5. It's In My Hands: Sven-Erik**

*Sven-Erik Engh: (II.11.1.22) My father's hands were rather large. He was a working man. All his life, he said to me, "The only thing I ever achieved was something done with my hands. When I think about my father, I always think about his hands. When I was a child, I had felt his hands once or twice, or something like that. I'm not a molested child. Nothing like that.*

*There was this special occasion. I was sitting in a playground. Peter and I were having fun, playing in the sand. It was really nice. Then there was a time when Peter was doing something to me, and I told Peter not to do this. He threw sand in my eyes. Then he did it again.*

*So I repeated to Peter, "Don't do this! Don't throw sand in my eyes. It's really unpleasant!" But Peter just did it once more.*

*And then I warned him, "If you do it, again, I'm going to hurt you!"*

*Then he did it once more. I had the shovel in my hand and I hit him very hard in the forehead. It was really quite severe. He had a head wound. A lot of blood. A lot of grownups screaming. (laughter) I knew when my father came home from work, there was only one thing that he could do. And he did. So he beat me.*

*But when I lay down in my bed, after I'd been told to lay in bed, and never hurt anyone any more, I had this sensation, "Why didn't he ask me? Why didn't he ask me what actually happened?" He didn't ask for the story. He just heard that I made this severe wound, and he didn't like that.. So he just hit me.*

*So that's a question actually for my father. Why didn't you ask me? My whole life is like, I wanted a response from my father, because we were so separate. My world was so different from his. I am an artist. I've been traveling round in Namibia in Africa and China with the theater. I tried to explain this to my father and he doesn't understand a word. It's like he says, "What are you talking about? It's not my world." We can talk about football or sports. That's o.k. But not what I actually want him to ask me, "What are you doing?" Or: "What happened?" (applause)*

## **Story #6. Clarity In A War Zone: Nomi**

*(II.12.2.55) Nomi Taslitt: My story is about a defining moment in my life and career. I work for the General Accounting Office (GAO). When I first joined the GAO, I knew I wanted to travel. So I went to the European office. I traveled all over Europe for four years. Then when I came back, I still wanted to travel. So I got an opportunity to go to Somalia. This is about thirteen or fourteen years ago. It was a period of civil strife at that time. The reason I was going was that Congress to know what was the condition of the country. They were trying to decide whether to give the country more aid. It was military aid and it was rumored that they used these weapons against their own people.*

*So I went off to Somalia. When I got there, the place I needed to get to was in Hargeza (sp), which was in the war zone. I couldn't get a commercial aircraft to get in there. I couldn't drive there. But I found a contractor that a Cessna and would take me there, so that I could complete my mission that I had come there to do. As I was coming in to Hargeza, the Cessna starts wobbling its wings like this. So I ask, "What's the matter? What's going on?"*

*And the pilot says, "Oh, I just want to show that we're friendly, so that they won't fire on us." (laughter)*

*So then we landed and we were met by a military convoy to go around the country, and I had a camcorder and I was taking pictures. I was able to do what I came to do. During this experience, though, I was saying to myself, "I have an eighteen-month old son at home."*

*And I'm really lucky that nothing happened. I was able to go there, and do what I needed to do, but my priorities needed to be revisited. I realized that maybe*

*traveling would have to take a back seat to raising my family and being close to my son.*

*So that's what I did. I hung up my traveling urges after that. (applause)*

### ***Afternoon session***

#### **STORY #7. YOU TELL IT: GAIL**

***Gail Rosen:*** (II.31.1.20) *A friend called me. It was going to be Yom Ha'Shoah, the day of holocaust remembrance and he said, "I've invited a survivor to come and speak and I have to fill the living room, so that I'm not embarrassed. Will you come?"*

*My husband said, "No way!" My kid said, "I've heard it in school." But I had never heard a survivor speak, and I'm a storyteller. O.k. so I went, as a favor.*

*She told an amazing story. She was a German Jewish survivor. She lived through twelve years of Hitler's reign. She survived, having to leave public school at age eleven, losing a family home and farm, moving to Frankfurt, transport to the ghetto, the death of her fiancé, her grandparents, her mother, her father, transport to Auschwitz, selections as the Nazis decided who would live and who would die, the death march back to Germany, the DP camps – she didn't miss any of it. It was an amazing story, an astonishing story. She told it with grace and even humor.*

*And afterwards we were sharing refreshments, and another woman said to me, "What do you do?"*

*I said, "I'm a storyteller."*

*Hilda was standing with her back to us, behind the other woman, and she heard me and she turned around and came forward and said, "You said you were a storyteller?"*

*I said, "Yes."*

*She said, "Do you tell stories of the holocaust?"*

*I said, "No. I don't feel entitled to tell them. They are not my stories. But they need to be told and I'm glad I was here tonight. I was honored to have heard your story. I hope you will tell it for a long time. But I wonder who will tell it when you no longer tell it."*

*She smiled. She said, "You tell it!"*

*And I didn't know at that moment how that would reverberate in my life. It took me several years to figure out how to tell her story. I have now told it in many*

*different audiences, including to a group of Germans and Jews who came together in Germany, for a compassionate listening project for German-Jewish reconciliation. Every time I tell her story, I hear her story. Her story is now my story. And I'm still living with the reverberations of that moment when she said, "You tell it!"*

#### **STORY #8. DELETED**

#### **STORY #9: NAMES ARE STICKS AND STONES: RUAIRI**

*Ruairi: (II.34.2.13) I worked as a paralegal in Belfast. It was my job to listen to stories. And more significantly it was my job to act on those stories. Once I found myself taking instructions, that is, listening to a story on which to act, from a mother and her daughter. And her daughter, the young girl, was about seven years old. And she was very nervous and excited, just to be telling her story. And she told me how she got to school, escorted by the police, through "the gauntlet." She and her mother had to run the gauntlet to get to school. People were hurling abuse and, on one occasion, a blast bomb.*

*She and her mother were embarrassed and excited to tell their story. The young girl told me what on one occasion, a big man in a white T-shirt had shouted at her. She looked at her mother to see whether she could actually say the word. And her mother encouraged her to go and say it. And giggling with nervousness and embarrassment, she said that he called her a whore.*

*So I listened to the story, and acted on it by writing a letter. But my acting on it, and my writing the letter was completely insufficient. The remedy that I was there to give was completely insufficient as a remedy. It didn't address the fact that names are sticks and stones.*

#### **STORY #10: TO BE WEAK IS TO BE STRONG: ALICIA**

*Alicia Korten: (II.36.0.00) This story is about my father and my relationship with him.*

*My dad, he's a big guy. He has a big voice. A big presence. He's a speaker and a thinker. What he does is he talks to the government. He is also rather impenetrable. He doesn't have a lot of real vulnerable moments.*

*There was a time a few years ago when there was a very big event happening on the West Coast. And this event was very important to him. It represented a lot of things that he had been working towards for much of his life. And so he was really anticipating being a big part of that event.*

*And it turned out that just before the event, he was in North Carolina and he got a nose bleed. And it wouldn't stop. He ended up in the hospital. And he couldn't fly because of the pressure. They had sauterized his nose and they were worried that if he flew, he would re-injure himself.*

*And he was devastated about this. I was in D.C. and I didn't actually go to North Carolina, but I spent a lot of time with him on the phone, walking him through this and supporting him through it. And this was very powerful for me, because my dad is not a guy who looks for a lot of support from people. He likes to stand on his own two feet. And so there was something of a role reversal happening in that moment in our relationship.*

*One of the things that I did – I actually had a friend who was going to that meeting – and I had him call my dad, and relay what was happening as things were unfolding.*

*My dad called me after that call and left a message on my machine and he said, "Thank you. Thank you. I love you."*

## **STORY #11: THE TURNINGS OF THE HEART: DEBBIE**

*Debbie Watson: (II.37.1.20) I always, always, always wanted to be a doctor. When I was a little kid, I would play with those models of the visible man and the visible woman, that you could take apart and look at all the organs and stick them back together again. I had visible heart that actually pumped blood through it. One Christmas, I got a microscope and learned how to wrap a life goldfish in wet cotton and put him under the microscope and watch the blood pulse through its tail. (Laughter).*

*Later, my parents still don't know this, but I would steal my church money that is supposed to go into the collection plate, and cut out of the sanctuary and go down the hill and go to the little market and use my church money to buy hearts from the butcher, or eyes that you could dissect, or livers or kidneys. (laughter) Then I'd place them around pieces of glass and put them in jars of formaldehyde and decorate the shelves in my room with all of these great trophies. And when I got into junior high school, a teacher taught me how to catch salamanders and gas them (laughter).*

*So I worked for a doctor for most of my teen years, and I went on to the University of California and realized I didn't know anything about physics – couldn't figure it out. Chemistry was absolutely mysterious to me. I loved biology but when I got to the biology labs I was just mystified as to what I was supposed to do.*

*At the end of the fifth quarter, I failed – to me – my chemistry class by three points, getting a B+, instead of an A-, which disqualified me from medical school. I went to the teacher and begged to have the grade adjusted but he refused. I cracked up in the ladies room of the chemistry building in the university in Santa Barbara.*

*I changed my major. I took a quarter. I hung out on the beach and became a psychology major. I was pretty miserable because at that school, they believed, “if rats do it it’s real.” (laughter) So I went through all those experiments.*

*Now I want to fast-forward to about eight years ago, when as a licensed psychologist, I was in the delivery room with my sister who was having her third child. The first two were C-sections, so this was a planned Caesarian. As soon as the incision was made, they let us come in and watch, and I snuck to the end of the table where I could peek over the sheet, and watch what was going on. Here’s my sister’s body open and a child has just come forth from it. I’ve got the mask on and I’m carefully watching the doctor who’s teaching other interns and residents there. I’m carefully watching to make sure it’s o.k. My sister is purring, “Isn’t the baby beautiful?” and I am saying, “I can see your fat later!” (laughter) It was fascinating!*

*But, in that day, I am so glad to have had the opportunity to realize that I am so glad I never ever ever became a doctor! (laughter)*

## **STORY #12: MOMENTS OF GRACE: MARY-Alice**

*Mary-Alice Arthur: (II.38.2.12) Thank you also to the other storytellers. Thank you for your offerings. As a facilitator, I’ve been realizing that part of the journey I’m on is to figure out exactly what to say when. And when not to say things. And when it’s valuable to say things. Those kind of moments have been really appearing for me in the work that I do.*

*It’s not been all that long ago that I kind of discovered what my life has been telling me, which is that the messengers and the angels and the guidance are everywhere, actually if you know where to look for them. And sometimes they crop up at the strangest moments. I told the group about two of the moments in my life that have become a critical turning point for me in the way that I live.*

*The first one of those was when I was in high school, my mother was the guidance counselor for high school. This does put a severe cramp on your style. When I was in junior high, my father worked there, so I’ve had cramps in my style for a long time. My mother worked with this man who was this other guidance counselor. I don’t remember him as being very good at his job. He had a rather interesting son. Rob had been an exchange student in Japan and I didn’t have a*

*lot to do with him before that. He didn't go to our school. But I recall talking to him when he got back. There something about him. Something. I said to my group, it's the "ooh" factor. There was something about that person that was so exciting, I thought, "I have to have some of that. I'm going to get myself some of that."*

*So I applied to become an exchange student at sixteen and they turned me down. So I went back the next year and then they had to take me. That set some things in motion. I was an exchange student in Germany at the age of seventeen for my last year of high school.*

*When I came back, I was then forced to go to Purdue University. My dad said, "I'm going to know where you are for this year." But I found out that Purdue had a junior year abroad program. (laughter) I had a lot of advanced credit. I did the summer school and I went abroad again in my second year at university to the University of Hamburg, which is where I found about a student organization that sent people around the world on an exchange basis. I started that program the year I came back from Hamburg. I immediately applied to them.*

*And I found out there was an international congress happening in Chicago in 1980. Nobody from the U.S. wanted to be on the delegation for that, because Chicago is not very exotic. But I did. So I was in the hallway of the hotel at the conference I was attending, waiting for my interview to be on the conference delegation. And I was sitting there wondering, "Oh my goodness, what am I going to say?"*

*Then this woman came, who I didn't recognize, and kind of sat down beside me and said, "What are you doing?"*

*I said, "I'm waiting for my interview."*

*"Oh," she said. "What are you going to say?"*

*Well, I bumbled through something and she said, "What about you say it like this?" And she told me something to say.*

*And I went into the interview and I said that.*

*And they took me. And when I came out, I never saw her again. But I think she was probably one of the angels.*

*And I think now, when that resonance comes through my life and I say something to somebody and they say to me, "That's exactly what I needed to hear!" that everyone of us is an angel in turn.*

## **Smithsonian Associates: April 2002:**

### **ENDLESS JOURNEY<sup>1</sup>**

This was the final story told at the Smithsonian Associates workshop in April 2002. It was told by Birute Regine about the work of Linda Rusch at the Hunterdon Medical Center in New Jersey.

*A woman from England was admitted to Three West several times after being diagnosed with a terminal disease. She had no family in America and often seemed to take comfort in being admitted to the unit, whose nurses had become like family members to her. On the last admission, it was evident that she would soon die. Carol and other nurses were sitting on her bed, marveling at her courage and faith as she told them she was going on another endless journey. They asked how they could make things better for her.*

*She had two requests. Although her family was in England, she didn't want them to come see her; she did, however, want to talk to them on the phone. The nurses helped her do that.*

*The second request was that she didn't want to die alone. She told Carol she wanted to be held. Carol thought about how silly she would look if someone saw her, but nevertheless, she lifted the covers and lay next to her in bed and held her for a long time. The English women fell asleep shaking because even though she was courageous, she was also afraid. Call bells went off, and Carol recognized that one of them was hers. As she began to climb out of the bed, a nurse coworker appeared at the door. She came close and whispered, "Move over, I'll take your place. I love her too."*

*That began a period of two days when their dying friend was never left alone. Nurses stayed over time to hold her, others came in early. At the end of two days, when she had completed her calls to her family, they could feel her spirit leaving them. They had fulfilled their promise; she was never alone. She passed on to her "endless journey" held by each and everyone one of them.*

## **Golden Fleece Stories of November 2001**

### **THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF STORYTELLING 2004**

*I have the fantastic opportunity to interview the leaders of the innovation storytelling of Washington DC. I'm very excited about interviewing these leaders because it's about an international symposium on storytelling. The symposium is attracting people from segments of every aspect of life, "cradle to grave" as we put it, both before and after, from educational institutions to organization, from corporate to whatever, you name it. And these people are coming from all over*

*the world to attend this international symposium, because of what we have done. We have got ongoing R&D. We've got ongoing practice and this was an incredible organizational feat, done by a very small group of dedicated committed passionate people.*

*And what is so fascinating about it is that everyone who participated in the organization of this organization actually did this in their own organizations, and then they took this to other organizations. And in fact, this group was so successful that they have been asked to participate in the UN peacekeeping mission to create storytelling among warring factions all over the world to help bring about world change.*

*And the way we were able to do this was that people were very open and trusting and they used storytelling within the group themselves, to empower and strengthen themselves.*

*As a result, it got to be a very strong collaborative environment and network, and through networking, then there would be these various opportunities, because they would look at people's strengths and weaknesses. And when an opportunity came up, they looked to see who in the group would work best and most collaboratively with those potential clients. And they were using online training and integrative learning of storytelling with the modern instructional techniques.*

*And one of the challenges that they are beginning to have, is that they are starting to have discussions as to whether storytelling is something that should be credentialed, should be academic. Or is that philosophically opposed to the experiential and incorporative nature of storytelling? And then of course the power of stories: they can be used for good or for evil. How do we make sure that the people who are involved in our group at least would be using story to help transform the world to a positive future, while recognizing that the definition of a positive future could be completely different, depending on where you are coming from. So this group has accomplished a tremendous amount, and it's through the power of storytelling that they were able to accomplish all this within this relatively short period of time.*

## **THE ICENINE ARTISTS' COLONY**

*Seth: Everyone in our group is going to tell a piece of the story. There's a Kurt Vonnegut book called *Cat's Cradle* in which there's this chemical substance called IceNine and the whole story is about the scientist who's trying to keep the IceNine in the test-tube because as soon as it comes out, it reacts with the air around it, and changes the molecular structure of the entire universe.<sup>2</sup> So we want to be the IceNine artists' colony.*

*Steve: This artists' colony is working on multiple levels and different facets, not just the mind, but also the heart, and visual, and sound, and dance. And it's open. And it's accessible.*

*Rob: So, one day, the CEO of the largest Japanese corporate conglomerate, you know, the conglomerates that run everything, he's the most powerful man in Japan, he's the Bill Gates of Japan, and he happens upon one of our meetings. And at first, he's just completely taken aback by what he sees going on. "This is very, very strange," he says. For example, he sees a lot of people around but he can't figure out who's in charge. It seems like it's a little chaotic, but people are very excited and there's this incredible exchange of energy and there are even children running around, and the place feels special. There's this sense of place about this community too. It isn't just a sterile room in an office building but it's out in nature, and people seem to live around there. And first he's just totally shell-shocked.*

*Sharon: Then the people in the artists' colony start to walk him through and give him a tour, not unlike the story of B.F. Skinner's Walden 2\*, and as the group walks him through, they talk about how they wanted to make this a place where it's an artists' colony, where your art is your life, and the work that you do takes up so much of your time that it is your art. And so all of us are doing all of the diverse things that we do, but coming to this as a place to share the spark. We get sparks from one another from the things that we do together. But not just us. Also we get sparks from other groups like us, that are linked with us. It's an open source model like a network. There are other groups and we get sparks from them and we catalyze each other.*

*Seth: And that's the story. We're pushing our boundaries, but that's our story. Dance, poetry, martial arts, improvisational theater, experiential learning, teams, a genuine holistic Renaissance.*

*David: Do we all live together on this colony?*

*Sharon: That's one option.*

*Seth: Yeah baby.*

## **GOOD SHIP, "THE GOLDEN FLEECE"**

*Sharon: You might remember that about six months ago, maybe two years, that the best-selling book, *In Search of The Golden Fleece: Storytelling for Organizational Transformation in an Imperiled World*, hit the best-seller list. It just caught the imagination of people around the world, and the authors were the members of this little group, which began just a couple of years ago in*

*Washington D.C. and it was with their vibrancy and their commitment to the search for the Golden Fleece.*

*Michael reminded us of the story of Jason and the Argonauts. Jason is going out. He knows that his world is imperiled, corrupt and whatever else, and he's out on a search for what can be brought back as a healing, as wisdom, and whatever else, back to his imperiled world. So this somehow captured the imagination of the entire planet. This group had discovered compelling ways to release the best of our stories within the group and within their organizations. And that was the first part of the book. And then subsequent chapters were stories from those who read the first part, and contributed chapters of their own. So this was a book unlike any other book, because it was written organically in several stages. The first one was an unfinished one, and then it became this full book. And it excited so many people that something special was created, much like an artists' colony, but the way that this group envisioned it, it would be on a ship.*

*And that's what we're reporting on today because the ship has just docked in the marina. It's called The Golden Fleece. And it's embarking on a first journey, the people who were in the original group plus many people who had participated in the book. And others too, who were just curious, who had some yearning to be a part of this experience. And they're going to take off. And there will be this contained experience and the artists' colony will be invited to be part of this – provided that they behave themselves. But by being on this wonderful ship, there is the whole journey aspect. There's the water. There's the self-containment knowing that we must depend on one another, for our well-being, for the relationship, and it's here where we can really reach for and reach toward our deepest knowing and share that.*

*Then in three weeks, that group gets off. Another group gets on. Now these people are seeded with these wonderful ideas and experiences. So they go out and basically they go out and talk with the world. So this is this traveling experience. So that's our ship. And it's sailing all around the world.*

*Alicia: Another piece to the boat was that it was both a real thing and also a mythic thing. And the story of traveling by boat, The Golden Fleece, is a mythological interpretation of the group's journey together. And the boat is the sacred vessel that we create in our meetings and at our gatherings. And the water is the emotional realm and the flow of light. And so, in this sacred vessel, we are bobbing along, on that flow of life, of opening, of space, for more and more people to experience the ferment of that, and the flow.*

## F. Golden Fleece Stories: July 2001

### LIFE AFTER DEATH OF A DREAM: SHARON COX

*Sharon: Five years ago, a dream had enough shape to it that I knew it was a dream, instead of just fragments or ideas or hopes. And the kernel of the idea was creating and attracting people who were strongly committed to supporting businesses to be responsible. Responsible is such a big word. I mean, to be responsive to the people in the organization and the work that they were doing or the service that was being provided, so that it would serve the world in some way as well as truly serve the people within the organization. So it just happened that the company that took me to Seattle – I was doing socially responsible investing, working with investors who had pulled together their ethical structures and to say, “You know, it can go beyond just this part of my life, it can also include investing. So those were the sort of people I was hanging out with and talking with and teaching about what social responsibility was.*

*So when that company decided that they couldn’t hold on to the Seattle office and it closed, I was on the street, if you will. I thought, “Well, could I take this idea that I was so much ‘in’, that belief, in that possibility what truly responsible businesses could do, what a powerful force this could be for all of us. So what would happen if that were taken to the community level? So that instead of working for the companies and portfolios, what would happen if you mirrored that in the community. Suppose there were two drycleaners there, and you knew that one was a responsible business and the other wasn’t, would you go there even if it cost fifty cents more for your cleaning?”*

*So it was that whole kind of thing. So that idea just grew in this effortless, beautiful way. It was like a force just taking me along with it. And the name came to me one morning and I woke up and it was the Responsible Business Development Institute. And I told several people and they said, “No, it’s too long.” Or “It’s not cute”. I got some pushback on the name. It was too long. It wasn’t suitable for marketing. Yada, yada, yada. And should I move off that. Or whatever. And I said, “O.k. maybe.” And I looked at every word and I looked the etymology and it was all there. Every time I looked at each of the words, I thought: no, no, no. It was truly authentic. It was the Responsible Business Development Institute. That’s the name of the dream.*

*Fast forward a year and a half and that was the death of the dream. For a long time, I was so ashamed to even talk about it. Then I flipped to the other side and became arrogant about it. If you have a failed business, it’s another notch in your belt, right? I had a failed business, wow! Put that in your pipe and smoke it! So that’s what I went to. And I didn’t realize it till today.*

*But I missed it until this afternoon, the hurt of what that meant. I really flip fast. I'm good at that. When I'm down, and I go up, way, way up the other side. So that was the beginning. What I realized was, what's next? I think I'm still looking for working partners. So the idea of the Responsible Business Development Institute was there, but it was really, I wanted a something, that was like a magnet, that could really draw the people, that I could play with intellectually and with the authentic people and relate to with my heart and indeed that was what attracted those people to that idea. But a great concept does not a business make. I always thought it was the institute itself. But it's finding working partners. That's what I'm looking for. It's finding working partners.*

### **ISABEL: AN AMERICAN STORY: MADELYN BLAIR**

*Madelyn: Isabel was sixteen when she said goodbye to her mother. Her older sister was supposed to go on the trip. But she didn't want to go. And Isabel said, "I'll go."*

*So she took the hand of her cousin and they left the town that she had grown up in. When they got to the ship, Isabel didn't understand that her passage included food. So she would not eat any food. As a result, she didn't get seasick, and so she was given the children to feed, the infants, and when they didn't finish a bottle, she would drink the milk.*

*And that's how she survived in the first few days. Finally, some one caught on and said, "Isabel, it's o.k. You can eat." And so she came to America, because she wanted something better for herself and her family.*

*She married someone also from her home country, and at the age of 93, when she died, she was survived by 8 children, 21 grandchildren, 40 some great grandchildren, and I don't know how many great grand children. There were also 6 doctorates, a superintendent of schools, a principal, innumerable teachers, several business people, a religious, a chief economist, and some artists.*

*The other day when I was riding home from work after one of my client commitments and at the end of the day, I'm tired and so I was listening to country music because it has lots of energy and there was this song by Jennifer Andrews, called, "Who I am". And there's a line in the song that says, "I am Rosemarie's grand-daughter."*

*And as I listened to that, I found myself singing, "I am Isabel's grand-daughter."*

*And I was suddenly overwhelmed by the passion of my regard for her.*

## **THE BASKET: PATTI DIGH**

*Some years ago, I went to a small Quaker college in North Carolina, with about 1600 students. I was away from home for the first time. At home, everyone knew what I was doing all the time, because everybody knew my father since he was the town barber.*

*My first year at college, I fell in love for the very first time with the most magical man – Richard was president of the student council, he was the favorite disk jockey at the college radio station, he was a brilliant artist, making holograms. He was a truly wonderful person.*

*When I came home from college at the end of the first year, I told my parents stories about this wonderful man. And so my parents became equally excited about him, as I told them story after story about him. And they said why don't you get him to send you a photograph so that we can see what he looks like and we can invite him to the house when you both get back to school in the fall. And so I wrote to him – he lived in Philadelphia – and he sent me a photo. The moment I laid the photograph on the dining room table, everything changed - because Richard was black.*

*And I was trying to figure out in my little head how could this be, how one little act could so change their excitement about this whole process, about me, and about my relationship with them. They disowned me and said, "You know, if this continues, we're not going to pay for your college any more."*

*So I ended up quitting school and getting a job. I was a vegetarian, still am, but the only job I could find was working at Wendy's as the chief burger maker, because I had a photographic memory for the orders that were being placed.*

*In the middle of all this, my father died at age 53. And as I was going to the funeral, my mother told me, "You killed your father."*

*Richard and I were together for six years, and then we started to grow apart. I was concerned that I might be ending the relationship because of my parents and the ways that people responded to us. But I finally decided that we were going in different directions and so we separated. This was a very difficult experience but I decided that it was the right thing to do.*

*Then after all these years, a few months ago, Richard contacted me to explain that he was undergoing an operation to become a woman. All these years, he had kept a basket with some mementos of our relationship, and after 22 years, he felt strong enough to open it. Inside, among other things, he found a lock of my hair and a pair of diamond earrings that I used to wear. And Richard – now Amanda – is wearing those earrings herself now.*

## **THE TOUCHSTONE: LISA KIMBALL**

*Lisa: So, once upon a time, I was working with an organization that will remain nameless, but some of you may have been involved with this organization or an organization like it. And I was going to facilitate an off-site meeting and so I did the traditional preparations and I interviewed everyone and asked what was on their minds. And 100% of the things that come up in those kinds of interviews came up. It was all about what the other people didn't understand and that the nature of the organization was such that it was impossible to talk about x or y or z because that's just not allowed here. Where if I were to say what I thought about this project or that project, I could be sent to the office in Siberia or whatever. And I had decided that I would use an open space design for this meeting which was going to require people to speaking more openly. I knew I needed something to open the group up. So I told them a story about my family. We were a very progressive family and always that first to take advantage of new things coming along, particularly because my mother was a working mother. And one of the things she adopted was a dish called noodles almandine. It was basically one of those dinner-in-a-box things. It was one of those things where you just add water. That was on the rotation that we had about once a week for a very long time in our family.*

*And one night for some reason, and I don't remember why, maybe it was the family truth night, I said, someone - I think it was my grandmother who lived with us at the time - asked why we were having noodles almandine and admitted that she really didn't like it. And I said, well, "I don't really like noodles almandine very much." My father said, "I HATE Noodles Almandine"*

*And my mother said, "I don't really like noodles almandine at all; I thought you guys liked it." We'd been literally having it once a week for more than a year but nobody had wanted to be the one to say they didn't like it because that might hurt my mother's feelings or cause an argument or something.*

*And so I told this story in this group and that kind of opened up a space where then other people in the group started telling stories about things that they hadn't sared talk about. It became a touchstone story, where all someone needed to say was "noodles almandine" and it came to mean, "We've all been thinking this all this time, but nobody's ever dared say it out loud ... for example, never asked, "why we have these stupid staff meetings that everyone agrees are a waste of time."*

*Throughout the rest of this offsite, it turned out very successfully. For the group, noodles almandine became the code word to mean, "Let's tell the truth."*

## Smithsonian Associates: April 2001:

The following discussion took place in Friday evening, April 2001 at the Smithsonian Associates' Symposium on organizational storytelling – a forerunner and catalyst for the creation of the Golden Fleece Group. You can find the transcript of the film being discussed at: <http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org/Katalina1-enrolling.html>

### ON POSSIBILITY AND THRIVING

*Therapist (male): My first response is to be very thankful. Twenty-nine years ago last week, I had an experience that I call “thriving”. And for the last twenty-six years, I’ve been working on a book of possibility, or “thrival”. And this is such a boost, and such a clear pathway for all the things that go with thriving. The word “possibility” isn’t over. And I am very moved and grateful to have had this experience.*

### THE MASTER STORYTELLER DOES EXACTLY WHAT A CONDUCTOR DOES

*Professional storyteller (female): I should know this, as I’m a professional storyteller. I do it for entertainment, for education, for making a difference, one at a time. And that video was absolutely wonderful. Because I go into this with both feet cold. And the master storytellers do exactly what the conductor does. Once you make that connection with the audience, one-on-one, be it adults or children, it’s just an absolutely marvelous experience. And so, I’m just validating your video. I’m like the cellist. Or the singer. You know, I think I’ve finally got it.*

### IN THE PANDEMONIUM, SUDDENLY THERE WAS SILENCE

*Participant (female): I was struck by listening to the music and the idea of how important the music is. It reminded me of just a couple of weeks ago when I was in New York and I was rushing around and I was on my way to the lower East Side and I had to make a transfer in the subway and I went down one level. And there was just pandemonium. The train was late. It had been diverted. I don’t know what it was. Huge commotion. And then I heard some music and I glanced over to a place on the platform where there was a guy who had set up some kind of musical instrument that I hadn’t seen before. It was like an oriental thing that he played with two sticks, and he started to play. And after about two minutes, maybe less, the entire platform was silent. There wasn’t a sound. Except the music. They’d made a circle around him and then suddenly I heard the train. And the train came and I got on the train. And I took that music with me.*

### KIDS WITH SHINING EYES

*Teacher (female): I am one of these academic people who teach in university and my field is children’s adolescent literature. And one of the topics that I am*

*teaching right now is literacy through storytelling. And we are working with a number of school districts sending out graduate students. We're doing research on this, and we're trying to do in-services with teachers to show them how to get excitement into their classes. And we had a wonderful experience last spring. We invited eight hundred kids to come in. I'm at Texas A&M university and we use the Bush library there and we've put tents all over the place and we've got kids from all over the state coming in the most exciting one was when my undergraduates prepared the stories and they were telling them to some kids who were learning disabled and these kids had shining eyes and they said it was the first time that they had gotten excited about a story. You've got no idea what that did to my undergraduates. Because now they know they can go out and they can be really profound and excellent teachers. I thoroughly enjoyed it.*

### **INSPIRING SHINING EYES**

***Participant (male):** Hi. I know what it feels like, not only to have shining eyes, but to create shining eyes. And for people who have not told stories yet, it feels just as good to give the shining eyes as to have them.*

### **THE WAY HE MOVES HIS BODY**

***Participant (male):** I like the music in this video. But what I like even more are the motions that the guy did. I think it's an integral part of the whole experience here, the way he moves his body, the way he enters into the spirit of the music, just by his motions. It reminded me that there are many forms of storytelling. Storytelling in writing is very different from storytelling as narration. And I think that the most striking thing to me is the body motions.*

### **IF ONLY I HAD SEEN THIS A YEAR AND A HALF AGO**

***CEO (male):** Yes, as I was watching this marvelous movie, this film, I was thinking that I am very sorry that I saw it now and not about a year and a half ago. I have been with a consulting company here in the District of Columbia for eighteen years. The first seventeen years, I was in various positions and then the last year, I have been the CEO. And my first seventeen years were fine, I enjoyed them. The last year was hell. (Laughter) It was certainly the least satisfying year in my career at that company and seeing this movie, I certainly don't understand all of what I should, but I think that when I was the CEO, I looked at myself as being a problem solver. I was the number one problem solver for the company. And that's not a particularly satisfying or interesting way to spend one's time. So I wish I had seen this a little bit earlier and maybe I would have done a better job as the CEO. I thank the creator, Katalina, for the movie. It really was marvelous. (Applause)*

## **THE AUDIENCE BECOMES PART OF THE PERFORMANCE**

*Participant (male): As I watched this movie, I recalled that I had tried to learn a little bit about flamenco music. It evolved as a form of music where you have a singer, a dancer, a musician, and some music. But it was also in terms of a very small audience. The audience became part of the performance. And that's exactly what the film is showing here, the audience involvement. Maybe the closest musicians that I've seen do that is the rockabilly singers, if you've ever heard them.*

## **THE METAPHOR OF MY LIFE: MUSIC**

*Participant (female): This is really exciting for me and it reminds me of a time about fifteen years ago. I belonged to a group in an organization – actually the World Bank – it met every Friday morning and it had various things happen. But at some point, everybody that belonged to the group had to tell their story. And I was very apprehensive as it came to be my turn. And I thought about everyone else who had been telling their story and then something really hit me and that was that everyone who'd told their story had some kind of unconscious metaphor behind their story. Maybe it was a production chart. Maybe it was a game that they were winning. Something like that. Then that got me thinking. What could be my metaphor? And I really wondered if I had one too. And I noticed this is the way that this film began, with this discussion of metaphors. And I came to the idea that really the only thing that fit my life was music. And this metaphor was really exciting. It had a transforming effect on my life and what I did after that. So this was wonderfully resonating for me.*

## **LEAD FROM WHERE YOU STAND**

*Employee (male): I've worked for a number of different organizations and companies and I guess that when I first started to watch this movie, I thought how much I would like to have a CEO like Ben Zander, with that kind of inspiration. But then as I watched this a little bit longer, the quote "Lead from where you stand" really came through. And that you don't need to wait for a CEO to watch this kind of movie. You can really be inspired and take the lead yourself.*

## **IF THE VOLUNTEER'S EYES DON'T SHINE, THEY DON'T STICK AROUND**

*Non-profit employee (female): For the past thirty seven years, I have been an employee of a large non-profit. I've retired recently, just this last week, and I have started what's going to be a career, a second career as a volunteer. And I sure many of you have done volunteer work for different organizations. And you know, if the volunteer's eyes don't shine, they don't stay around very long. So this is really exciting. And I'm looking forward to taking these ideas back to my organization and to what's coming tomorrow.*

## **BASS PLAYERS ARE NEVER UP FRONT**

*Musician (male): I'm a musician part-time, and I can definitely say I wish I had worked with Ben Zander's all the time. But like most leaders, I'm not quite up to that caliber. I think that it's really great to see that example. As far as the idea of leading from where you stand, I am a bass player and the bass players are never up front. And usually most people don't know what the role is. But you can always feel a good bass player. You can always feel a weak bass player. And I think it just goes to show that you can lead from whatever position you're in.*

## **THE FILM IS FUNDAMENTALLY MISLEADING**

*Participant (male): I find the film fundamentally misleading. It really reflected a message in which the medium dominated over what the message was. The medium very clearly showed a leader who was hyper-kinetic. I doubt that one in fifty people in this room would aspire to be a hyper-kinetic leader. The film was made because this was very filmable. What would have been far more constructive would have been somebody demonstrating those principles in a not-particularly filmable way, in a more sedate, organized business environment, in which people behaving the way you and I behave in a normal day. And because the kinetics so dominated the picture, it was really hard to pull out what the significance of those messages would be in what I would call a calmer, and more normal context. So I found the film fundamentally misleading. (Laughter)*

*Participant (male): My reaction to that is that I think your approach is somewhat logical, as opposed to a story-like approach.*

*First participant: It's a curse, I know. (Laughter)*

## **WHEN PEOPLE SPEAK FROM THE HEART**

*Participant (female): I find that when people speak genuinely and sincerely and from the heart, no matter how they express it, it's going to show in their eyes. I think you can see that in the film.*

## **DOING IT ON ONE BUTTOCK**

*Office worker (female): I think that I am going to go back to the office and in whichever situation I am in, and I'm going to try to do it on one buttock. (Laughter)*

## **I'M NOT A READER BUT I CARRY BOOKS AROUND WITH ME**

*Writing teacher (male): I found it exciting to see the film because I was just carrying around and in part reading the book, *The Art of Possibility*, by the Zanders, and I certainly recommend that to everyone because it is an amazing*

wonderful book that identifies the ideas that we just looked at. But I also want to say that that idea of, kind of, carrying around books is something that I do. I am not by nature necessarily a reader. So people say, "So, what are you carrying around now?" (Laughter) I am actually carrying around now John Seely Brown's book. But I also wanted to say that several years ago, I was in a situation where I was in a class that was called, "Finding your life's work" and it was a ten week course. And at the end of nine weeks of the class, what I discovered was that my life work really was teaching possibility. That's what I came up with.

And then I thought, "Oh, of all the nerve, what the heck does that mean?" So at the same time, I had been working as a government contractor. I had worked for three of them and now I was with a fourth one. It was sort of a dead-end road. And I was offered the opportunity to work for another dead-end road. And I said to myself, "No, that doesn't fit." So I took that opportunity to step out, and begin teaching possibility. And I'm happy to say that in the past five years as a teacher, as a writing teacher, someone who teaches people how to find their way through information, when they are blockheads like me, people who don't necessarily read, but people who try to find their way through information. It's been a delight and an exciting adventure and it's been a wonderful story. And I just want to thank all of you guys for this opportunity as well.

### **CALM, SEDATE AND POISED SINCE 1959, AND TIRED OF IT**

*Participant (female):* Well, with all respect to the gentleman who felt the film was misleading, I've been calm and sedate and poised since 1959. (Laughter) And I'm tired of it. The film looks good to me. (Applause)

# Golden Fleece Chronology

Golden Fleece Organizational Storytelling Group

Chronology of Events Through April 2003 prepared by Rob Creekmore

- Pre-2001 Various informal meetings on uses of storytelling in organizations at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough TN. Early pioneering work of Rick Stone, Steve Denning, David Snowden, and others. Denning and Snowden begin convening “Master Classes.”
- Fall 2000 Seth Kahan creates the StorytellinginBusiness listserv
- March 2001 Lisa Kimball and Rob Creekmore convene the Virtual Storytelling in Business Symposium, sponsored by the International Storytelling Center
- April 2001 Steve Denning convenes the first Smithsonian workshop on organizational storytelling
- May 2001 Initial luncheon at the World Bank to explore forming an organizational storytelling group in Washington, DC
- July 2001 First official meeting of the DC Organizational Storytelling Group (OSG -later known as “Golden Fleece”) at George Mason University. Paul Costello leads the Living Stories Process, supported by Seth Kahan and Rob Creekmore. Four “Stories of Our Beginnings” by Madelyn Blair, Sharon Cox, Patti Digh, and Lisa Kimball, are selected to represent the community’s beginning.
- August 2001 Paul Costello concludes the Living Stories Process with the group, supported by Rob Creekmore. First meeting at our regular venue at Van Ness Condominiums, hosted by Lynne Feingold. Draft “Description” for the OSG prepared by Madelyn Blair and Rob Creekmore.
- October 2001 Dave Rippey leads OSG session on “Leadership Stories” at Alicia Korten’s home. Annette Simmons and Jimmy Neal Smith convene a meeting of major organizational storytelling practitioners during the National Storytelling Festival. Rick Stone, Steve Denning, and others make presentations on organizational storytelling at the Festival.
- November 2001 Madelyn Blair leads OSG session on “Storytelling and Appreciative Inquiry” at the World Bank. Three “Future Stories” are created by the group, including one entitled “The Good Ship Golden Fleece,” from which the name “Golden Fleece” emerges for the OSG. Seth Kahan creates the GoldnFleece listserv.

- December 2001 Seth Kahan and Rob Creekmore lead OSG session on “Tapping the Archetypal Power of Stories in Organizations” at Van Ness (all further OSG sessions are convened there).
- January 2002 Michael Salla leads OSG session on “The Hero’s Journey Applied to the History of American Foreign Policy.”
- February 2002 Seth Kahan leads OSG session on “Activating Human Potential in Communities of Practice.”
- March 2002 Denise Lee leads OSG session on the “Knowledge Sharing Initiative Using Storytelling at NASA.”
- April 2002 Alicia Korten leads OSG session on “Creating a Culture of Conscious Storytelling in Organizations.” Steve Denning and Seth Kahan lead another Smithsonian workshop on organizational storytelling. Many of the major organizational storytelling leaders present at the “Action Enabled Learning: The Power of Narrative” conference in New York.
- May 2002 Steve Denning leads OSG session on “Seven Highest Value Forms of Organizational Storytelling.”
- June 2002 Dave Snowden leads OSG session on his work with narrative in organizations using complexity theory.
- July 2002 Paul Costello leads OSG session on “The Irish Story” with his young Irish interns from the Young Leaders program that Paul leads.
- August 2002 Joan Girardi leads OSG session on “Exploring the Use of Story in Knowledge Sharing” using simulations. Later in the month, Seth Kahan previews his NASA workshop on Work Life Balance.
- September 2002 First StoryCon conference convenes in Palm Springs, CA.
- October 2002 Paul Costello and Rob Creekmore intended to lead a session on “Using the Living Stories Process to Discover Our Stories of the Present” but there were insufficient numbers so there was an open-ended dialogue instead. Rob Creekmore, Steve Denning, and Seth Kahan make organizational storytelling presentations at the National Storytelling Festival. The following day they convene an open exploratory session among people interested in organizational storytelling. Around this time Denning, Kahan, Madelyn Blair, and others begin sharing the Golden Fleece story at various conferences and events around the world.
- November 2002 Steve Denning and Seth Kahan led an OSG discussion on the sprouting of new groups in Atlanta, Albany, San Diego, and Boston, as

well as the possibility of an entire weekend of events around a third annual organizational storytelling event at the Smithsonian.

- December 2002 Alicia Korten, Lynne Feingold, and Sharon Cox led a performance of Alicia's poem "The Voyage of the Golden Fleece" at Van Ness. Paul Costello convened the first of a monthly series of workshops entitled: "Becoming Storywise: An Introduction to Narrative Practice" in Bethesda, MD.
- January 2003 Seth Kahan led a New Year's Ritual during the OSG session.
- February 2003 Seth Kahan led an OSG session on "Storytelling and Our Work in the World"
- March 2003 Noa Baum led a workshop which was a "trial run" of a workshop that she is planning to give to lawyers on the subject of listening.
- April 2003 Greg Kramer and Rob Creekmore led an OSG session on "Storytelling and Mindfulness." SMITHSONIAN WEEKEND!

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.plexusinstitute.com/story-show.cfm?id=14>

<sup>2</sup> Note on B.F. Skinner's Walden 2: This is a story about a community where a scientist visits a community and eventually decides to leave his job and join the community. It reflects Skinner's views as a behaviorist who believes that different individuals are interested in different things and also learn at different paces. Thus, children need to be in an environment where they can master their interests at their own pace, with a lot of personal attention yielding to more and more independence with age. Skinner then illustrates what such education would be like, with small laboratories being set for children to experience many things and thus learn by seeing the meaningfulness of what they are taught. In short, Skinner tries to recreate the workings of natural selection with behavioral engineering methods. The argument is that human beings have stopped experimenting with what works and what does not work. Our civilization has settled down in its own ways, and now tries to fix its problems from the inside, blinded by the false belief that civilization was the best thing ever made. Skinner argues that there are better ways to live, and that to find them we need to experiment with different things and find what works for everyone of us.